

Testimony of Melissa Zablonksi
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In support of
HB 6884 (AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE
TEACHING PROFESSION)

March 15, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee,

I testify today in support of House Bill 6884. This bill takes important steps toward addressing the educator shortage in Connecticut, showing educators that theirs is a respected profession, and ensuring that our classrooms and schools can provide the best possible education for our students.

Too often, teachers feel that they are being managed from the top-down; their voices are missing from decision-making processes that ultimately impact their work in the classroom. HB 6884 takes an important step to involve teachers more directly in these processes through the creation of a Teacher Advisory Committee to the Connecticut State Board of Education, as well as through the appointment of Connecticut Teachers of the Year as non-voting members of the Connecticut State Board of Education. The passage of HB 6884 will provide an incredible opportunity for *current practicing* teachers to be involved in the policy making process. As a result, the Commissioner of Education and CSDE can be confident that policies put forth in the future will be implemented effectively and with fidelity because teachers with “boots on the ground” played a part in their creation.

Recently, I had the privilege of participating in an educator roundtable with the Commissioner of Education and other Connecticut Teachers of the Year, finalists, and semifinalists. The discussion focused on recruiting, hiring, and retaining educators from the perspectives of practicing teachers. When I asked my colleagues for their insights on these topics, I was met with enthusiasm and remarks such as, “They really want to hear from *us*?” My fellow teachers were surprised that the “higher-ups” in Connecticut’s education system would even entertain what we had to say about the state of the teaching profession. As teachers, we want each student to feel like their voice has a place to be heard within our classrooms and that what they say matters. However, it is difficult for teachers to lift the voices of their students when they feel that their own voices are not being heard. HB 6884 will help change the culture of the teaching profession in Connecticut so that teachers feel heard and respected, rather than dismissed and invisible. Teachers should not feel shocked when they are invited to provide guidance on the policies that will affect their classrooms. Instead, they should feel that they already have a seat at the table and the ability to speak up when they need to be heard.

This school year has been particularly difficult for me and my colleagues, and many of us have questioned how long we can continue in this profession. However, my participation in the educator roundtable as a Connecticut Teacher of the Year Finalist made me feel heard and made me feel that I mattered as an educator; I was not just some entry in the state’s database of educators. I think all of us who participated left feeling reenergized towards our work, empowered to be agents of change, and respected by our policymakers. The roundtable was productive and solution-oriented, an incredible

think-tank of educators who want nothing more than to lift the teaching profession for teachers and students. We tell our students every day that they matter, and this was the first time in a very long time that I felt I too mattered as a teacher in the eyes of the state. It made me hopeful for the future of teaching in Connecticut. I, and the other participants, felt all of this after *one* roundtable conversation. Imagine how energized and empowered teachers of Connecticut might be if given the opportunity to meet regularly with the CSDE as proposed by HB 6884.

The bill states:

The Commissioner of Education shall establish a Teacher Advisory Committee consisting of members selected by the commissioner in accordance with the provisions of subsection (b) of this section. The committee shall provide advice on improving elementary and secondary education in the state, including policy processes and guidance on the implementation of policies relating to teaching and education in the state. The committee shall hold quarterly meetings, provided at least two such meetings during the year are held in person, and advise the commissioner on teacher recruitment, special education, testing and assessment, equitable distribution of teachers, diversity of the teaching workforce, school safety and security, social and emotional learning and other relevant issues relating to teachers and education.

Our state is an example of how remarkable education can be, and if stakeholders at all levels can collaborate and problem-solve, our state has the opportunity to be even more phenomenal in how we serve our students and support our teachers.

Thank you for your consideration,

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